

C.I.A. Grant Raises Questions on Research Rules at Harvard

By COLIN CAMPBELL

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CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — Several years ago, according to Nadav Safran, a professor of Middle Eastern studies at Harvard, a representative of the Central Intelligence Agency dropped by his office to ask what he was working on.

Dr. Safran, now the director of Harvard's Center for Middle Eastern Studies, showed the man from the C.I.A. the draft of part of a book he had been writing on Saudi Arabia. The visitor looked it over, said he found it interesting and asked if the agency could help Dr. Safran complete his research.

Such were the beginnings, according to Dr. Safran, of a "private," "confidential" \$107,430 research contract with the C.I.A.

The disclosure of the contract last month, together with the disclosure of a more recent C.I.A. grant to Dr. Safran of \$45,700 to help finance a conference on politics and Islam, have led Harvard officials to inquire both into Dr. Safran's conduct and into the extent to which other confidential Government work may be floating around the university.

They have asked, moreover, if the university's rules, which prohibit outside sponsors from financing secret research at Harvard, may be vague and subject to misunderstandings.

The case has led to additional questions of whether Government-supported secret research at universities across the country has been increasing, and whether such research should be permitted at all.

Nature of Research at Issue

The dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, A. Michael Spence, announced after the disclosures that Dr. Safran should have told Harvard about the conference grant, which would normally have been made public. The contract for the grant has not yet been made public, and Harvard administrators refuse to discuss the case until they have finished an investigation.

Dr. Safran has said that the book contract with the C.I.A. was between him and the agency, that the research was private and that this arrangement was within the rules for research grants at Harvard.

The contract, dated April 13, 1982, and signed by Dr. Safran a few weeks later, provides for the preparation of a report examining "the relationship of defense, security, and foreign relations issues in Saudi Arabia," as presented by Dr. Safran to the C.I.A.'s Deputy Director for Intelligence. The intelligence or analytic branch of the C.I.A., Dr. Safran and some of his defenders say, must be distinguished from the agency's operations branch, which engages in covert activities.

Research Published as Book

The report that the C.I.A. contract called for, Dr. Safran said, became a book, "Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security," published this fall by the Harvard University Press.

The contract also called for additional papers and services, including "three consultations with you at the Langley facility," various progress reports and also a separate, shorter study to be "produced by an advanced graduate student" under Dr. Safran's guidance that would "examine whether a modern middle class is taking root in Saudi Arabia."

"We are particularly interested in the changing makeup and background of the military," the contract said. "The analysis should conclude with judgments about the implications of this development for political stability over the next two to eight years."

In addition to paying Dr. Safran, the grant would cover the expenses of two research assistants, a secretary, a leased word processor, books, telephone, computing services and travel. "The principal place of performance shall be the contractor's facility located at Harvard University," the contract states. An amendment to this provision includes Dr. Safran's home as well as Harvard.

Abridging Academic Freedom

Dr. Safran also agreed not to "specify Agency sponsorship" of his research in any publications unless authorized. Moreover, an amendment saying that the research would be "based on open sources" and not on secret intelligence still reserved "the Government's right to review and approve any and all intended publications." It also stressed "the Government's right to deny permission to publish."

For university-sponsored research, many American institutions, including Harvard, forbid such restrictions on the ground that academic freedom would be abridged.

C.I.A. spokesmen have said that the restrictions in Dr. Safran's book contract were standard. One spokesman, Patti Volz, denied that such research was "secret." She called it "confidential."

When Dr. Safran finished the manuscript, he said, the C.I.A. approved it without a change.

Arthur J. Rosenthal, the director of the Harvard University Press, said the press had known nothing about the C.I.A. support. This was the first time, so far as he knew, that a book under the Harvard imprint had been subsidized by the C.I.A.

Dr. Safran denied assertions that his work might have been slanted by its C.I.A. connection. "I'm a sovereign scholar," he said.

'Anxiousness to Preserve Access'

His earlier books on the Middle East gained him a reputation as an unusually clear-headed analyst, and "Saudi Arabia" was favorably reviewed in The New York Times Book Review on Oct. 6. The book was officially published Oct. 18, and few other reviews have yet appeared.

His critics, who have asked for his resignation from the Middle Eastern Studies post, have said that a known C.I.A. connection could threaten access to certain nations and individuals. a point Dr. Safran conceded. But he asserted that an "anxiousness to preserve access" could itself slant a scholar's judgment.

In any case, he said, he had discussed the C.I.A. book contract with the university and had been told that Harvard concerned itself only with contracts that formally involved Harvard, and not with "personal" grants.

He would not name the Harvard official he had consulted, and he said he did not know if the official had actually read the C.I.A. contract.

Edward Keenan, who was dean of the Graduate School and also director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies when Dr. Safran got his book grant, recalled that Dr. Safran had told him he was applying for a C.I.A. grant but that it sounded "personal" and was therefore none of the university's business.

"I didn't discuss it very seriously because the center wasn't going to get involved," said Dr. Keenan, a scholar of medieval Russia. He said he had never seen a C.I.A. contract.

Some Scholars Avoid Conference

Some others at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies also knew about the agency's financing of the book, including a graduate student who helped with research; Dennis N. Skiotis, the center's associate director, and Barbro Ek, an assistant.

A handful of other scholars knew of the C.I.A. role in the recent conference on Islam, according to Daniel Pipes, a professor of strategy at the Naval War College in Newport, R.I. Dr. Pipes participated in the conference. A dozen other scholars stayed away.

Dr. Keenan said that researchers prefer contracts as private consultants rather than grants involving Harvard, which always require large payments to Harvard to cover the use of university facilities. "In a certain sense no one in his right mind takes a contract on this side of the street when he can take it on his side of the street," Dr. Keenan said.

Dr. Safran has been quoted as saying that he got an individual grant for the conference on Islam because he did not want to pay the university's high overhead. Dean Spence has announced that the conference used Harvard's name and facilities and was therefore an official Harvard grant, and that Dr. Safran misread the university's rules.

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